

Subnational transnational networking and the continuing process of local level Europeanization

Abstract

One of the features of local level Europeanization has been the emergence of transnational networking (TN) undertaken by subnational authorities (SNAs). This activity, which received much attention during the 1990s, enables SNAs to take advantage of the opportunities created by European integration. However empirical analyses of TN are lacking, despite European integration and the wider context SNAs find themselves within evolving. Consequently little remains understood about how SNAs engage in TN and how they are affected by Europeanization pressures. Using the case of TN undertaken by SNAs in South East England and Northern France, this article finds that Europeanization has created more opportunities for SNAs to engage at the European level. SNAs have, in turn, taken advantage of these opportunities, leading to increased participation in TN. However SNAs' approaches to TN are not uniform. Engagement remains marked by differentiation as local level factors, such as local strategy and political objectives, affect how SNAs participate in TN. This differentiation is likely to become increasingly marked as SNAs respond to contemporary challenges such as budgetary pressures and, in the case of South East England, Brexit.

Key words

Transnational networking; Europeanization; cross-border cooperation; subnational government; English Channel.

Introduction

One of the dominant themes of research into European subnational authorities (SNAs) is the impact of the European Union (EU) through Europeanization (for example Barbehön, 2015; Benz and Eberlein, 1999; de Rooij, 2002; Goldsmith, 1993, 2003, 2011; Hamedinger and Wolffhardt, 2010; John, 2000, 2001; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Kettunen and Kungla, 2005; Marshall, 2005, 2006; Murphy, 2007; Oikonomou, 2016; Pflieger, 2014; Van Bever et al., 2011). The EU impacts SNAs in a number of ways. They have to comply with a range of EU legislation and policies, and are responsible for much of the day-to-day implementation of EU policy. EU rules affect how local services are delivered and determine eligibility for accessing EU funding. Yet, the EU also provides an ‘opportunity structure’ for SNAs (Keating, 1999) to engage beyond their territorial limits to influence decisions and share policies (Schultze, 2003; Van Bever et al., 2011).

Transnational networking (TN), comprising of voluntary horizontal links between SNAs across national borders, is one way SNAs have taken advantage of the opportunities afforded by Europeanization. Indeed, while for some TN is seen as a new form of governance or institutionalization of transnational space (for example Church and Reid, 1999; Leitner and Sheppard, 2002; Perkmann 2003), for others it confirms the presence of Europeanization processes at the subnational level (for example Goldsmith

1993, 2003; John, 2000, 2001; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Le Galès, 2002). It allows SNAs to access EU funding (for example Pflieger, 2014), to influence EU policy (for example Heinelt and Niederhafner, 2008), or to engage in policy transfer or deliver joint projects (for example Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). In this way TN reveals Europeanization not only as a top–down process where SNAs are mere ‘downloaders’ of EU policy, but also provides opportunities for bottom–up and horizontal engagement (Van Bever et al., 2011).

Studies first identified the presence of TN from the 1990s (for example Benington and Harvey, 1994, 1998, 1999; Ercole et al., 1997). A number of networks whose membership comprised of SNAs were founded, such as Eurocities (Griffiths, 1995; Sampaio, 1994) and the Four Motors (Borrás, 1993). Cross-border cooperation between SNAs also emerged (Perkmann, 2003). This is true of the English Channel, where TN had to contend with geographical, as well as cultural and administrative barriers (for example Church and Reid, 1995, 1996, 1999).

However, empirical analysis since the 1990s has been lacking. When this activity was still a relatively new phenomenon, Benington and Harvey (1998) asked whether TN constituted a ‘new paradigm or passing fashion’. Was it a temporary ‘fad’ or did it represent a longer-term change in the relationship between the local and European levels? Answering this question remains important for our understanding of local level Europeanization. European integration has progressed since the 1990s as

both the EU's membership and policy competence have expanded, increasing the pressures of Europeanization on SNAs. At the local level SNAs have undergone significant changes to the way they operate, broadly described by some as a shift from 'government' to 'governance' (Cole and John, 2001; John 2001). Since 2008, SNAs across Europe have faced additional pressures in the form of austerity, as revenue grants and local budgets are cut (CEMR and Dexia Crédit Local, 2012). In this context, Guderjan (2015: 944) argues 'the budget cuts imposed in the course of the 2008 economic crisis had a constraining impact on the Europeanisation of local authorities' (see also Guderjan and Miles, 2016: 642). Yet at the same time interest in EU programmes has increased as SNAs see their potential for addressing financial constraints (Guderjan: 2015: 944).

Engagement in TN is voluntary, but a lack of contemporary empirical research means little is known about how SNAs use it to respond to this changing context and the opportunities created by Europeanization. This represents a gap in understanding of local level Europeanization, which this article addresses. The article shows that TN has continued and remains prevalent. An overall evolution in SNAs' approach to TN, characterized by increased engagement, multilateralization and policy specialization, indicates they have become increasingly affected by Europeanization. This is explained through SNAs' opportunism. As European integration has created more opportunities for SNAs, SNAs have in turn taken advantage of these by engaging in TN. Secondly,

despite all SNAs being involved and the level of participation increasing, engagement in TN is marked by differentiation, both in the extent and the mode of engagement. This is explained by the presence of local level factors, such as local strategy and political leadership, which shape SNAs' response to the opportunities presented by Europeanization. The overall picture is one of SNAs becoming increasingly influenced by Europeanization and the opportunities it creates, but where local factors continue to play a significant role in how SNAs respond. This confirms the agency of SNAs in local level Europeanization. As SNAs enter a period of uncertainty brought about by budgetary pressures and, in the case of England, Brexit, this agency will be crucial in determining SNAs' future engagement in TN.

To uncover these local level Europeanization processes, this article studies the TN activities of 14 SNAs in South East England and Northern France.⁽¹⁾ These cases represent the highest level of directly elected subnational government below the nation-state. In both England and France SNAs operate within highly centralized and unitary systems. While in France SNAs enjoy some constitutional protection, there is none for SNAs in England. SNAs in these systems are part of fluctuating institutional environments where their role and existence is often contested. In England this unstable institutional environment is illustrated with the creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships, and more recently moves towards city deals and combined authorities (see Sandford, 2016a, 2016b). This is illustrated in France with the amalgamation of the

mainland *régions* in January 2016, bringing the number down from 22 to 13. In England this has led to a weak local level, where SNAs are dominated by the centre (John and Copus, 2011). In France this has additionally led to confusion over the division of competences and responsibilities across multiple levels of government (Cole, 2011). Over the last 20 years SNAs in both polities have adapted to new ways of working which place emphasis on ‘governance’ and contended with ever increasing pressures created by Europeanization (Cole and John, 2001; John, 2001). More recently these SNAs find themselves working within the confines of austerity as central government revenue grants are reduced (CEMR and Dexia Crédit Local, 2012). English SNAs are also facing uncertainty following the leave vote in the United Kingdom’s (UK) referendum on EU membership in June 2013 (Local Government Association, 2016; Sandford, 2016c). The overall context for English and French SNAs, therefore, is one of challenge.

The empirical findings are derived from an analysis of 68 qualitative interviews with subnational officers, politicians and others directly involved in TN. Interviews were supplemented with information from relevant websites and an analysis of over 100 documents produced by SNAs, largely dating between 2001 and 2011. This timeframe represents a good window to capture the effects of developments at the both EU level, such as enlargement and expanding policy competence, and at the local level such as austerity and a continually evolving institutional landscape.

This article proceeds as follows. Firstly, it briefly introduces the concept of local level Europeanization. It then outlines the background of TN in the English Channel region before examining how the transnational activities of SNAs in South East England and Northern France have evolved since the 1990s. These findings are then discussed within a Europeanization framework, with specific reference to increased and differential engagement in TN. The implications of contemporary challenges, such as austerity and the UK's vote to leave the EU, are then discussed.

Local level Europeanization

Studies on Europeanization have become a defining feature of scholarship on the EU and its member states. Despite the term being used in a variety of ways (see Featherstone, 2003; Olsen, 2002), it is taken here to mean 'the domestic adaptation to European regional integration' (Vink and Graziano, 2007: 7). While the main focus of Europeanization studies has been on the adaptation of national politics, policies and politics, several scholars have applied the concept to the subnational level (for example Barbehön, 2015; Benz and Eberlein, 1999; de Rooij, 2002; Goldsmith, 1993, 2003, 2011; Hamedinger and Wolffhardt, 2010; John, 2000, 2001; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Kettunen and Kungla, 2005; Marshall, 2005, 2006; Murphy, 2007; Oikonomou, 2016; Pflieger, 2014; Van Bever et al., 2011). The presence of Europeanization processes at

the subnational level has been confirmed in comparative studies (for example Goldsmith and Klausen 1997; Denters and Rose, 2005; John, 2001; Le Galès, 2002).

TN has been characterized as part of this process. Local level Europeanization has traditionally been characterized as a top–down process, whereby SNAs are impacted by the EU as they ‘download’ EU policy and adapt to EU norms and rules. However, the presence of TN points to a more complex relationship between the EU and local levels. It is recognized that Europeanization is a two-way, cyclical, process (Schultze, 2003). In this way local preferences are ‘uploaded’ to the EU, as well as downloaded (Van Bever et al., 2011). Horizontal Europeanization dynamics have also been observed. While the EU is not directly involved, it provides a reference point for local actors to cooperate and share policy ideas with each other or deliver joint projects (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Van Bever et al., 2011). TN allows SNAs to take advantages of these bottom–up and horizontal Europeanization dynamics, for example by participating in networks which influence the EU’s policy process (for example Heinelt and Niederhafner, 2008) or which facilitate policy transfer (for example Kern and Bulkeley, 2009).

Early studies into local level Europeanization investigated the extent to which SNAs had become Europeanized (for example Goldsmith, 1993; John, 2000, 2001). They found that while local level Europeanization was present across Europe, its impact varied between SNAs. Klausen and Goldsmith’s (1997: 242) analysis of local

engagement with Europe found that ‘all the EU member countries have their proactive and counteractive municipalities, as well as their reactive and passive ones’, while Balme and Le Galès (1997) pointed to the presence of ‘bright stars’ of Europeanization, as well as ‘black holes’. Rather than leading to convergence, this differentiation, Le Galès (2002: 110) argued, led to a ‘variable geometry Europe’.

Accounting for this differential impact, Risse et al. (2001) argue that mediating factors at the domestic level affect the degree of change and adaptation to Europeanization. Variation is therefore expected. This is true of local level Europeanization, which is filtered by local mediating factors, such as local resources or political leadership (de Rooij, 2002; Oikonomou, 2016; Pflieger, 2014). Nevertheless, the extent to which this differentiated engagement with TN, and indeed Europeanization as a whole, has continued since the late 1990s remains contested. It might be expected that as European integration increased the pressures on SNAs and provides additional opportunities for engagement, participation in TN and Europeanization processes more generally would continue. Indeed, Lefèvre and d’Albergo (2007: 318) predicted convergence towards more uniformity in SNAs’ approach to international engagement, and Karvounis (2011: 214–215) argues the majority of European SNAs now participate in TN. However, the onset of the financial crisis raises questions about the continued Europeanization of the local level. Budget cuts and financial restrictions often lead SNAs to disengage from EU activities (Guderjan, 2015; Guderjan and Miles, 2016: 642;

Oikonomou, 2016). In England, this has been compounded by uncertainty following the leave vote in the UK's referendum on EU membership in June 2016. These challenges have led to suggestions that local level Europeanization processes may be 'reversed' (Guderjan and Miles, 2016: 642).

Transnational networking

TN can be broken down into three categories: bilateral networking, multilateral networking and transnational projects (see Table 1). The boundaries between each of these categories can be blurred. For example, a temporary partnership to deliver a transnational project might develop into a more lasting bilateral or multilateral network. Nevertheless, this categorization provides a useful framework to analyse TN, and captures how transnational engagement by SNAs has evolved over time.

<TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

The development of TN undertaken by SNAs in the English Channel region from the late 1980s and through the 1990s has been well documented by scholars (Church and Reid, 1995, 1996, 1999; Heddebaut, 2001, 2004; Sparke, 2000; Thomas, 2006; Wise, 2000a, 2000b) and supplemented by practitioner accounts (Barber, 1997; King, 2009).

From the late 1980s a number of cross-border bilateral agreements were signed by SNAs across the English Channel (Buléon and Shurmer-Smith, 2008: 174). The first was in 1987 between Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais (Barber, 1997: 20; Church and Reid, 1996: 1303). Hampshire's agreement with Basse-Normandie followed in 1989 and an agreement between East Sussex and Haute-Normandie followed in 1993.(2) This trend of bilateral cooperation continued, and by 1996 11 such bilateral links were in place between SNAs in England and France along the Channel coast (Poussard, n.d.). Links with authorities further afield were also developed. For example Bretagne signed a cooperation agreement with Saxony in Germany in 1995, while East Sussex signed accords with Veszprém in Hungary and Kreis Pinneberg in Germany.(3)

Multilateral networking also emerged. In 1991 Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais expanded their bilateral cooperation to include Belgian regions of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels-Capital in the 'Euroregion' network. Hampshire, Bretagne, Haute-Normandie, Basse-Normandie and Picardie were involved in the Atlantic Arc Commission, which also included members from the rest of the UK, France, Ireland, Spain and Portugal. The Isle of Wight was a member of a similar body, the Islands Commission, while Nord-Pas de Calais was a member of the North Sea Commission. These commissions came under the umbrella of a wider network, the Conference for Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR). By 1997 a similar network, the Arc Manche, included all the Northern French *régions* along with Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex,

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in England.(4) Wider inter-regional networking also emerged. Brighton was involved in four inter-regional multilateral networks (Church and Reid, 1999: 651). Southampton was involved in the Telecities and Smartcities networks.(5) Nord-Pas de Calais's involvement in the RETI network was also recognized (McAleavey and Mitchell, 1994).

Transnational projects also emerged. The Interreg I programme between Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais (1990–1993) led to 68 projects between local actors, many involving SNAs. This led to several long-standing partnerships which continued well beyond the life of the programme (Barber, 1997: 21). This was also the case under the wider Interreg II Rives-Manche programme which also stimulated cross-border cooperation between local actors in South East England and Northern France (Church and Reid, 1996: 1309). While many SNAs were engaged in TN before they were eligible for Interreg support, Church and Reid (1995: 304) argue it was the prospect of EU funding which often 'provided the catalyst' for cooperation, whether this was participating in joint projects or coordinating lobbying efforts.

In summary, SNAs proactively built bilateral links with their cross-border colleagues during the 1990s. These links were gradually supplemented with emerging cross-border multilateral networking. The Interreg programmes, and the gradual increase in the eligible areas for support, also served as a catalyst for cooperation, facilitating a number of transnational projects between English and French SNAs.

Participation in these TN activities was voluntary. The initiative to engage, and in some cases form, these networks came from the SNAs involved (Barber, 1997; Church and Reid, 1995, 1996, 1999; Wise, 2000b). This was a response to an emerging context. The construction of the Channel Tunnel was one such contextual factor, particularly for Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais who felt the tunnel could bring economic benefits to areas that were in economic decline (Sinclair and Page, 1993: 480; Thomas, 2006: 16; Vickerman, 1998: 175). Yet, there was a fear that the resulting high speed link would lead to a corridor effect, whereby the regions would be bypassed in favour of larger economic centres (Heddebaut, 2001: 62; Sinclair and Page, 1993: 479; Sparke, 2000: 198; Vickerman, 1998: 179). Cooperating was thus seen as a way to capitalize on the opportunities and address the challenges that the tunnel brought. Indeed Sparke (2000: 195) argues that it was the ‘anticipated infrastructural link that served as the major catalyst for ... cross-border cooperation’.

The development of EU regional policy, notably Interreg, presented another opportunity (Rees, 1997). So too did the completion of the Single European Market in 1993, which effectively removed economic barriers and, like the Channel Tunnel, had the potential to bring significant economic benefits (Church and Reid, 1995: 298). Significant growth was expected, particularly through the transport links between Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais. However, while administrative barriers were removed,

geographical barriers, namely the Channel itself, persisted (Heddebaut, 2001: 61–62).

Again TN was seen as a way to capitalize on opportunities and address challenges.

The TN which developed in response to these contextual factors was thus a reaction to a new geographical and political reality brought about through closer transport links and developments in the EU (Church and Reid, 1999: 646). In other words, it was a feature of the process of local level Europeanization; SNAs were adapting to a new reality of European integration, and capitalizing on the opportunities it offered. The impact and potential opportunities of this new reality overrode marked administrative, geographical and economic differences between South East England and Northern France (Church and Reid, 1995: 302), not to mention the often opposing ideological and cultural foundations of their leaders (Barber, 1997: 20; Church and Reid, 1996: 1305).

Nevertheless, since the 1990s this context has changed. European integration has evolved and seen the EU's membership and policy competence expand. Opportunities offered through EU regional policy have also evolved as Interreg and other programmes have expanded. These increased opportunities and pressures to adapt might suggest increased engagement in Europeanization processes, including participation in TN. However a lack of contemporary empirical studies focused on TN means little is known about this activity, or the processes of local level Europeanization which drive it. In the late 1990s Benington and Harvey (1998) asked whether TN represented a 'passing

fashion or new paradigm’. In other words was TN a temporary ‘fad’ limited to the 1990s or was it set to become a lasting feature of local engagement with Europe? This article now addresses this question by presenting empirical evidence of TN activities following the 1990s.

Transnational networking after the 1990s

Altogether, the 14 SNAs studied were involved in 302 transnational links between 2001 and 2011. These links are summarized in Table 2 and visualized in Figure 1. This illustrates several points.

<TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE>

<FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Firstly, TN remains prevalent, but the number of links varies between councils. For example in England, Kent is by far the most active with 47 links, while Portsmouth has only eight. Similarly in France, Nord-Pas de Calais has 34 links while Picardie has 13. Nevertheless, all of the SNAs studied participated in TN.

Secondly, individual SNAs often prefer participating in certain forms of TN. For example, Bretagne prefers participating in multilateral networks over bilateral

networking or transnational projects. Medway, on the other hand, favours transnational projects, while bilateral networking forms a large proportion of East Sussex's activity.

Thirdly, Figure 1 illustrates the complexity of TN. Different SNAs are often members of the same networks. For example, all of the SNAs studied except Medway and Portsmouth were members of the Arc Manche. Similarly, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and all of the Northern French *régions* have been members of the CPMR. These mutual links applied beyond the cases studied. For example, while Basse-Normandie had formed a bilateral relationship with Tuscany in Italy,(6) they were further linked through their mutual membership of five other multilateral networks: the CPMR, GMO-free Regions Network, AREFLH, AREPO and European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN). Tuscany's membership of these networks meant it also had indirect links with all the other Northern French *régions* along with Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and West Sussex and several other SNAs across Europe. This confirms TN as a broader European-wide phenomenon, rather than being confined to the cases studied here.

These overlapping links were seen as a way to further reinforce cooperation.(7) In many cases, pre-existing bilateral networking led to further cooperation in the form of transnational projects, sometimes involving other partners too. The most illustrative example is the bilateral link between Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais and the resulting participation in transnational projects this led to; between 2001 and 2011 these two

SNAs participated in 11 mutual projects along with four mutual multilateral networks (see Figure 2). On other occasions multilateral networks themselves are involved in projects which their members are participating in. For example the REALM transnational project led by Hampshire has the support of the Assembly of European Regions (AER), of which Hampshire is also a member.⁽⁸⁾ The AER has also developed links with other multilateral networks including the Arc Manche, ERRIN, AREFLH and NEREUS (AER, 2012a, 2012b). Indeed the AER's overlapping links with the SNAs studied, their bilateral partners, transnational projects and other multilateral networks is an illustration of how complex TN in Europe has become (see Figure 2).

<FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE>

Fourthly, there is a degree of overlap between bilateral links, multilateral networks and transnational projects. In some cases bilateral networking provides the foundation for wider multilateral networks. For example, the bilateral links between Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais, and West Sussex and Haute-Normandie ultimately led to the creation of the Euroregion and the Arc Manche respectively. In other cases permanent multilateral networks have been born out of seemingly temporary transnational projects; the now well-established POLIS network is one example of this.⁽⁹⁾

While Table 2 and Figure 1 show the links SNAs engaged in between 2001 and 2011, they do not account for how the level of participation changes over time. The level of engagement with TN constantly fluctuates. As one French regional officer stated: ‘it’s a kind of wave, it’s always changing’.(10) An English local officer similarly stated: ‘a lot of local authorities have had peaks and troughs of interest in engagement’.(11)

TN since the 1990s has therefore remained prevalent, but it also became characterized by complexity and overlapping relationships operating at a European level. This activity is now discussed in more detail.

Bilateral networking

Many SNAs in South East England and Northern France have continued their involvement in the bilateral networks they formed in the late 1980s. In addition new links have been formed. Indeed, while the number of bilateral links differs between SNAs, all of those studied except one, the Isle of Wight, participated in bilateral networking with European counterparts.(12) These links are outlined in Table 3. In most, but not all, cases a cooperation agreement forms the basis of these bilateral links.

<TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE>

Among these bilateral links are the more obvious cross-border ones, for example between Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais or between Nord-Pas de Calais and Wallonia. As discussed, many of these formed during the late 1980s and early 1990s. While many of these links have continued, new ones have been established, for example between Kent and the *département* of Pas-de-Calais, and between Bretagne and Wales.(13) Also during this period, French *régions* sought to reaffirm some of their existing bilateral links, usually through joint declarations or renewed cooperation agreements. For example Bretagne renewed their 1995 agreement with Saxony in 2005.(14)

Bilateral networking has also been sustained through regular joint working. For example, the leader of Kent and the president of the Pas-de-Calais *département* participate in annual meetings to establish a programme of work for the forthcoming year.(15) Another example is the case of the Hampshire–Basse-Normandie bilateral link, where each council takes it in turns to host an annual delegation from the other to engage in policy transfer and best practice exchange activities.(16)

Additionally SNAs have expanded their participation in bilateral networking beyond their traditional cross-border and historical ties. This is particularly the case with SNAs in Central and Eastern Europe. Here EU enlargement provided an opportunity for cooperation with SNAs in these countries. Examples include links between Kent and Bács-Kiskun in Hungary, Bretagne and Wielkopolska in Poland, and Picardie and Trenčín in Slovenia.(17) This confirms Church and Reid's (1996: 1304)

earlier observation that experience through initial cross-border links encourages wider TN, often further afield.

While the evidence points to an increased number of bilateral links, participants stated the level of interest and engagement varies over time. One noted:

those alliances have already been formed and they ebb and flow, so there'll be swathes of time when they're not doing anything at all and it's just a notional partnership.(18)

For example, the link between Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais had become less active, partly because preference had been given to cooperating with the *département* of Pas-de-Calais. However, there was once again interest among political leaders to re-establish it.(19) The link between Basse-Normandie and Tuscany was not currently in use, despite it being active in 2006.(20) The West Sussex–Haute-Normandie link had also become inactive.(21)

In some cases bilateral networking was not actively pursued. For the relatively new English unitary councils this was because there was no tradition of bilateral cooperation, as had developed with the older county councils. Other councils, such as Medway, preferred to cooperate with European SNAs on a case-by-case basis through

transnational projects rather than being tied into working with a limited number of SNAs.(22)

Multilateral networking

All SNAs studied, except Medway and Portsmouth, participated in multilateral networks (see Table 3). While the initial focus was on membership to cross-border networks, SNAs more recently have become members of wider inter-regional networks such as ERRIN, Peri-Urban Regions Platform Europe (PURPLE) or POLIS. These networks are far more prevalent than their cross-border counterparts. This supports the argument that SNAs' approach to TN has gradually evolved from the initial bilateral networking developed from the late 1980s, to the multilateral cross-border networks of the mid-1990s, to the wider inter-regional networks of the present day.

This shift also highlights the wider variety of policy areas covered by multilateral networks. SNAs can choose from a portfolio of European transnational networks to suit their local circumstances and in line with their strategic aims or priority policy areas. Indeed, SNAs are aware of this diversity, observing 'that the Brussels regional scene has well developed networks' covering several niche areas of policy (SEERA, 2005). This represents another difference from early TN activities, where networks tended to cooperate in a number of different policy areas rather than specialize in one.

In some cases councils played a role in establishing these networks. West Sussex and Haute-Normandie, for example, led on the development of the Arc Manche network.⁽²³⁾ West Sussex also (with North Holland) established the Airport Regions Conference.⁽²⁴⁾ Bretagne played an important role in the establishment of the Atlantic Arc Commission and the related CPMR (Wise, 2000a: 866, 2000b: 865).⁽²⁵⁾ In other cases SNAs played an important role in the strategic leadership of these networks. For example, Bretagne held the vice-presidency of EARLALL, Basse-Normandie was on ERRIN's board, Hampshire has been a member of the AER's presidium and Brighton and Hove twice held the presidency of the Eurotowns network.⁽²⁶⁾ While these leadership roles frequently change, they further indicate the importance of TN to SNAs.

As with bilateral networking, the level of involvement in multilateral networking changes over time; SNAs regularly leave networks and join new ones. For example the Isle of Wight withdrew from the CPMR in 2005 in order to make financial savings and pursue a focus on transnational projects (Isle of Wight Council, 2005). Hampshire withdrew from the same network in 2012,⁽²⁷⁾ and West Sussex left the Arc Manche network in 2011.⁽²⁸⁾ Leaving networks does not necessarily mean SNAs reduced their networking activity. While West Sussex left the AER, it immediately sought other opportunities to form new links at a European level (West Sussex County Council, 2000). Similarly Brighton and Hove left the Eurotowns network in 2008, but then sought membership of the larger and higher-profile Eurocities network as it was felt this

would better serve their interests and increase their European profile (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2008).

Networks themselves fluctuate in terms of how active they are. The Arc Manche was cited by many participants as an example of a network which regularly ebbed and flowed in terms of activity. As one stated:

Arc Manche fluctuated in terms of its strengths ... started off strongly and then there was a bit of a die down in activity in the late 1990s and then there was a bit of a re-launch in the early 2000s.(29)

While this re-launch led to a renewed declaration of cooperation,(30) participants on both sides of the Channel noted the Arc Manche was recently experiencing a lull in activity.(31) Nevertheless, there was again interest in reviving it as local politicians were invited to discuss Arc Manche activity during two cross-Channel forum events in Southampton in September 2012 and Caen in March 2013.

Multilateral networks also come and go. Indeed some networks which existed during the 1990s, and were observed by Church and Reid (1995, 1996, 1999), no longer do. For example the Transmanche Metropole had been operating 'in a low key manner' since it was unable to secure Interreg II funding (Church and Reid, 1999: 649) and is now no longer active.(32) Several networks which SNAs participated in between 2001

and 2011 appear to be disbanded, for example the Dynamo Regions network or the Alliance of Maritime Regional Interests in Europe. The Euroregion, involving Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais, is another example of a network no longer operating, having become effectively dormant since 2003 (Thomas, 2006: 14) and ending in 2004 (Kent County Council, 2010).

Transnational projects

Participation in transnational projects forms the majority of the transnational activity participated in by SNAs in South East England and Northern France, accounting for 193 links across the 14 SNAs studied. The subjects and policy areas covered by transnational projects are diverse. Accordingly these projects involve a range of other actors in addition to SNAs, such as universities, charities, local businesses and others.

As with bilateral and multilateral networking, the level of participation varies between SNAs, but has increased overall. This is in part due to the expansion of eligible areas for Interreg and other EU programmes. Under the Interreg III programme (2000–2006) the Transmanche area between Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais and the Rives-Manche areas between East Sussex, the Somme and Seine-Maritime were merged into one programme. While eligible areas for these cross-border programmes stayed largely the same between Interreg II and Interreg III, SNAs across South East England and

Northern France could now access Interreg funding through the new North West Europe transnational programme (Buléon and Shurmer-Smith, 2008: 174).

Eligibility was further increased under Interreg IVa (2007–2013) which covered the whole Channel area under two separate programmes: the Two Seas and France–Channel–England. Both of these programmes have continued into the 2014–2020 period. The introduction of URBACT in 2002 provided another opportunity for urban areas to bid for funding. SNAs were also able to access a range of other EU-funded programmes, including the Interreg IVa France–Wallonie–Vlaanderen programme, the Interreg IVb North West Europe programme, the Interreg IVb Atlantic Area programme, Interreg IVc, the Life Environment programme and several others.

However, while it is assumed such programmes promote TN (Church and Reid, 1995, 1996; Rees, 1997), the findings here point to a more nuanced picture. While Interreg and other EU regional policy instruments offer financial support and frameworks for transnational projects to take place, it is not the only way SNAs engage in this activity. East Sussex, for example, participated in a range of transnational projects with French partners which were independent of EU funded programmes.⁽³³⁾ Furthermore, as the above background showed, SNAs were collaborating well before Interreg and other EU programmes were available to them. Indeed, Interreg staff noted that the majority of project bids they received were based on established pre-existing partnerships, which long outdated Interreg programmes eligibility. In this way

transnational projects were a way to build upon existing bilateral links and use them to take advantage of funding opportunities.⁽³⁴⁾ As already noted, the Kent–Nord-Pas de Calais link led to a number of mutual transnational projects, and a commitment to pursuing joint projects can be found in many bilateral accords. Multilateral networks were also used to identify potential transnational partners willing to be part of a project bid. As noted in one English local government report, such networks offer the ‘Provision of a ‘ready made’ partnership to access EU funds to support practical projects of common interest’ (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2003). However, in some cases SNAs preferred not to depend on these pre-existing relationships, instead choosing project partners on a case by case basis.

Generally speaking, participation in transnational projects was higher among SNAs in South East England than it was in Northern France. This was also highlighted by Interreg staff, with one noting:

There is a different participation ... In France, maybe, what we have found more in terms of participation, it’s a more strong participation from non-government organizations. In the UK there is a big presence of counties, for example ... whereas in France it’s much more open to civil society.⁽³⁵⁾

Nonetheless, there were still differences between SNAs within South East England and Northern France.

Exploring local level Europeanization

The TN activities explored above demonstrate its continued relevance to SNAs, and provide a direct answer to Benington and Harvey's (1998) earlier question: TN was not merely a 'passing fashion' confined to the 1990s, but more closely fits the 'new paradigm' characterization. TN has become a lasting feature of European integration and SNA's engagement in EU politics. This analysis informs the debate on local level Europeanization in two ways. Firstly, it confirms that SNAs have become increasingly affected by Europeanization. Secondly, while all SNAs have been subject to increased Europeanization and all participate in TN, there remains differentiation in the extent and mode of engagement.

Increased Europeanization

When compared to earlier cases of TN, the analysis points to an overall evolution in SNAs' approach; they have not continued to engage in TN in the same way they did in the 1990s. Three trends characterize this evolution: increased engagement, multilateralization and a move from cross-border to wider inter-regional cooperation.

These trends can be explained by an increase in the opportunities offered to SNAs by Europeanization.

Firstly, there has been a marked increase in participation in TN. This is most evident with engagement in transnational projects, of which 193 examples were identified. This is partly explained by the gradual expansion of the eligibility criteria for EU regional policy programmes, which have sought to promote cooperation and now cover the whole of the English Channel area. This was often complemented by pre-existing bilateral and multilateral networks, which provided a basis for the development of project partnerships to take advantage of these opportunities, and in turn facilitated the rapid growth of transnational projects. Participation in both bilateral and multilateral networks has also increased. SNAs again saw opportunities, this time in EU enlargement and the potential shift of EU funding, and capitalized on this by developing bilateral links with authorities in Central and Eastern Europe (for example Kent and Bács-Kiscun, Bretagne and Wielkopolska, and Picardie and Trenčín). As highlighted by one participant:

I could see that structural funds in Europe were gradually going to shift towards helping Eastern Europe, because that's where the money was needed, and if we as a British county wanted to go on receiving we need to have links with them so we could do joint projects with them.(36)

In addition, by the late 1990s the number of multilateral networks present in Europe had increased, facilitated partly by established networks ‘breeding’ smaller ones covering niche policy areas (Ward and Williams, 1997: 462). SNAs began to recognize that as the EU’s policy competences increased so too did the range of multilateral networks and the policy areas they covered, and so provided yet more opportunities for engagement (SEERA, 2005).

Secondly, SNAs shifted their focus from bilateral to multilateral partnerships. This trend was already emerging during the 1990s as initial bilateral networks led to early multilateral partnerships such as the Transmanche Euroregion (following the Kent–Nord-Pas de Calais link) and the Arc Manche (following the West Sussex–Haute-Normandie link). This process has continued, and across all the SNAs studied participation in multilateral networking now outweighs bilateral networking. The fact that many bilateral links have become less active over time reinforces this point. Again, the EU’s increase in policy competences, complemented with the rise in thematic multilateral networks, accounts for this.

Thirdly, while the 1990s was characterized predominantly by cross-border networking, TN has since moved beyond this and is more inter-regional in character as SNAs pursue links with their counterparts further afield. This is partly a result of SNAs pursuing more thematically focused networks which do not place requirements on

partners to share geographical proximity and capitalizing on opportunities to form links with Central and Eastern European SNAs, as described above.

Overall, the increased level of engagement in TN witnessed here suggests SNAs have become increasingly affected by Europeanization. This is unsurprising given that adaption to the EU is triggered by the process of integration itself (Caporaso, 2008; Risse et al., 2001). As has been shown, SNAs have adapted to the ongoing reality of EU governance. Europeanization has offered increasing opportunities to SNAs, and SNAs have in turn taken advantage of these. For example, EU enlargement led to the development of bilateral networks with local authorities in Central and Eastern Europe, the EU's increasing policy competence led to engagement in specialist policy-specific multilateral networks proliferating, and developments in EU regional policy, such as the expansion of Interreg eligibility areas, led to greater participation in transnational projects.

Differential engagement

As discussed above, earlier studies pointed to the differential impact of local level Europeanization and SNAs' engagement with TN and the EU more generally (Balme and Le Galès, 1997; de Rooij, 2002; Klausen and Goldsmith, 1997; Le Galès, 2002). While there has been an overall increase in TN, as SNAs seize the opportunities

presented to all of them by Europeanization, the analysis presented here continues to emphasize this variation. There are two aspects to this.

Firstly, while all SNAs studied engaged with TN, levels of participation greatly varied; Kent for example had 47 links, while Portsmouth had only eight (see Table 2). Individual SNAs' involvement also fluctuates over time. While an overall increase suggests SNAs have become more 'Europeanized', the impact of local level Europeanization is not equal.

These differences in the level of engagement are explained by the varied strategic and political importance given to transnational engagement by SNAs. In England, for example, Kent, Brighton and Hove, West Sussex and Southampton demonstrated this importance by establishing European and international strategies (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2007; East Sussex County Council, 2000; Kent County Council, 2007; Southampton City Council, 2007; West Sussex County Council, 2001, 2002, 2006). These SNAs also had placed the responsibility for TN within the policy portfolios of prominent political leaders. Overall, participation was higher in these SNAs compared with others, such as Portsmouth which did not place any strategic importance in TN and where the political leadership were ambivalent towards TN.⁽³⁷⁾ Similarly in France, participation was higher in Bretagne and Nord-Pas de Calais where strategic importance was given to TN (Conseil Régional de Bretagne, 2011),⁽³⁸⁾ compared to Picardie, which was only just starting to develop its international

engagement strategy.(39) This also accounts for variation over time, as political importance attached to TN by SNAs also fluctuates. Indeed the fluctuating activity of bilateral and multilateral networks witnessed above, for example the Kent–Nord-Pas de Calais link, the Basse-Normandie–Tuscany link and the Arc Manche, are all explained by the changing levels of political and strategic importance local political leaders placed in these networks.

Secondly, SNAs varied in how they engaged in TN. They held varying preferences regarding the type of transnational networks they participated in. Bretagne, for example, favoured participation in multilateral networks, while Portsmouth and Medway did not pursue this activity at all. Contrastingly, East Sussex placed great emphasis on bilateral networking, while for others this only formed a small, or sometimes no, proportion of their activities. The policy portfolios of multilateral networks SNAs participated in similarly varied.

Differentiation here is again explained by the individual strategic and political objectives held by each of the SNAs involved. For example Bretagne was able to pursue its interests in maritime policy by engaging with the Atlantic Arc Commission, the Arc Manche and the CPMR, while Basse-Normandie's large agricultural sector made participation in AREPO and AREFLH a priority.(40) These objectives also change over time. For example, before 2005 the Isle of Wight focused on lobbying for Objective status and engaging in policy learning to tackle coastal erosion problems. This prompted

engagement in policy-specific multilateral networks such as the Islands Commission and CPMR. However, a new political leadership in 2005 shifted the priority towards obtaining funding for local projects, leading to the withdrawal from several multilateral networks, including the Islands Commission and CPMR, and increased participation in transnational projects (Isle of Wight Council, 2005).(41) Similarly with Medway, the strategic decision was made to pursue funding and not be tied into established bilateral and multilateral networks, explaining their heavy focus on transnational projects:

All our European projects have got all different partnerships ... when we develop a European project, we always accept any partner from the eligible area, from any organization. We don't refuse a partner because we haven't worked with them, we're always open to it. That's maybe different to some organizations who like existing partnerships over ten years.(42)

Variation here can also be attributed to SNA's previous experience of TN and the opportunities presented to them by Europeanization. For example, the relatively new SNAs of Brighton and Hove, Medway and Portsmouth had few bilateral links because they lacked the background to build these longstanding partnerships:

As a relatively new council, unitary authority, which was set up in 1997 we don't have traditional town twinning links, we don't have that background ... So our approach has always been around networks and multilateral links rather than bilateral links, we found that's the way we want to go.(43)

This also applied to transnational projects, where SNAs with a longer exposure to Interreg and other EU funded programmes had a much higher rate of participation. Indeed SNAs who had little or no experience of previous Interreg programmes before their expansion across the entire Channel, such as West Sussex or Bretagne, were less likely to participate.(44)

These examples all show that differentiated engagement in TN is explained by local level factors, which influence how individual SNAs respond to the opportunities Europeanization presents them (de Rooij, 2002). This resonates with earlier research which emphasizes that Europeanization does not necessarily mean convergence, and that its impact is mediated by a number of domestic factors (Risse et al., 2001).

The future of transnational networking in a changing context

The evidence presented here shows that over the last two decades TN has become a lasting feature local engagement at the European level. Nevertheless, there is persistent

variation between SNAs' engagement as each authority adopts its own approach to TN. This variation is likely to become increasingly marked as SNAs continue to respond to local pressures of austerity in different ways. As others have recently shown, some SNAs are reassessing their voluntary involvement in TN and are withdrawing to make budgetary savings (Guderjan, 2015: 944; Guderjan and Miles, 2016: 642). Indeed, the availability of financial resources often determines SNA engagement at the European level (Oikonomou, 2016). Participants in this study have similarly observed SNAs' withdrawal from TN as financial constraints become an increasing reality.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Nevertheless, SNAs still recognize the opportunities available by continuing their investment in TN, despite budgetary pressures. As highlighted in one report:

The last year has continued to be dominated by heavy pressure on public funding and budgetary reductions within the County Council. Whilst this might have made it more difficult for KCC to maintain an outward-looking focus and international profile, the importance of this activity, especially the contribution of EU funding to business priorities and the identification of European best-practice and collaborative working to improve performance has, if anything, increased. (Kent County Council, 2011)

Overall, SNAs' withdrawal from European engagement activities and the persistent variation may constitute a 'reversal' of Europeanization at the local level (Guderjan and Miles, 2016: 642). This points future research to examine these potential 'de-Europeanization' effects at the local level. However, Europeanization does expect variation between SNAs, and empirical studies show participation that TN and other European engagement activities are determined by local priorities, resources and leadership (de Rooij, 2002; Oikonomou, 2016; Tatham and Thau, 2013). As shown above, SNAs are adaptable and able to reorient their transnational engagement in response to changing circumstances and local priorities.

In England, this adaptability will be put to the test as the UK begins the process of withdrawing from the EU. While the outcome of Brexit remains unclear and puts SNAs in a position of uncertainty (Local Government Association, 2016; Sandford, 2016c), the opportunities presented by European integration will inevitably change. Engagement in TN is by no means dependent upon EU membership, as the presence of Swiss SNAs in European networks (see van der Heiden, 2010) or even the existence of wider international subnational TN (for example Bouteligier, 2013) illustrates. Nevertheless as this article shows, continued participation in this context depends upon the leadership of SNAs and their responses to the opportunities afforded by Europeanization and the constraints presented by austerity, Brexit and other contextual factors.

Conclusion

Local level Europeanization has become an ever present reality for European SNAs, which have found themselves increasingly affected by the EU. Yet local level Europeanization is not a one way, top–down process. The EU presents SNAs with opportunities for more proactive engagement, for example to inform the development of EU policy (bottom–up engagement) or by cooperating with each other to share policy innovation and deliver joint projects (horizontal engagement). By investigating the TN activities of SNAs in England and France this article has shed light on these bottom–up and horizontal aspects of local level Europeanization. The main conclusions of this article are two-fold.

Firstly, SNAs’ engagement in TN has evolved in line with local level Europeanization. On the one hand the opportunities afforded to SNAs by Europeanization have increased. SNAs have in turn taken advantage of these opportunities, leading to an overall increase in their engagement in TN. In addition, the changing nature of local level Europeanization means SNAs’ engagement in TN has evolved accordingly. While bilateral and cross-border co-operation were the norm during the 1990s, TN is now characterized by wider inter-regional and multilateral networking as SNAs respond to the opportunities created by the EU’s expanding membership and policy competence.

Secondly, despite the overall increase in TN, engagement continues to be marked by differentiation. Participation is not uniform as levels of engagement vary between SNAs, which often pursue different types of networking. Here SNAs' reactions to the opportunities created by Europeanization were mediated by a range of local level factors. These include local strategic objectives, local political leadership and pre-existing experience of TN.

The overall account of local level Europeanization offered by this article, therefore, is one where SNAs have been increasingly affected by Europeanization processes and offered new opportunities to engage. However, the local level impact of Europeanization remains very much determined by SNAs themselves, and the actors within them. This differentiation, and indeed the fact engagement in TN is a voluntary activity, highlights the agency of SNAs in the wider process of local level Europeanization, confirming it is not a simple top-down process. Rather SNAs play an active role in Europeanization, and that role is shaped as much by local politics as it is by developments at the EU level.

TN, therefore, remains an important part of SNAs' activity and their response to the continually evolving pressures and opportunities created by Europeanization. While this article has focused on South East England and Northern France, the continued presence of TN across the EU and beyond highlights its wider significance. The continued prevalence of TN, combined with SNA's opportunism and their varied

approaches to engagement as revealed by this article, points future research towards examining the agency of individual SNAs, and in particular their motivations for participation in TN. This agency remains significant factor in the process of local level Europeanization, particularly at a time when opportunities for EU engagement and the wider context SNAs operate in is constantly changing. As argued above, the differentiation witnessed in this article is likely to continue or become increasingly marked as SNAs respond to the constraints of austerity in different ways. Opportunities for transnational engagement for English SNAs are also likely to change following the UK's referendum to leave the EU. While the impact of this on SNAs and the future relationship between the UK and EU remains unclear, how individual SNAs respond will be crucial for how they are affected by local level Europeanization in the future.

<8,201 words (excluding tables, reference list and endnotes)>

Endnotes

- (1) These are Kent County Council, Medway Council, East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove City Council, West Sussex County Council, Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council and the Isle of Wight Council in South East England, and the regional councils of Nord-Pas de Calais, Picardie, Haute-Normandie, Basse-Normandie and Bretagne in Northern France.

Fieldwork was conducted prior to the amalgamation of French *régions* in January 2016.

- (2) Bilateral agreements between Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais dated 1987, Hampshire and Basse-Normandie dated 1989, and East Sussex and Haute-Normandie dated 1993, retrieved through personal communication.
- (3) Bilateral agreement between Bretagne and Freistaat Sachsen dated 1995, retrieved from http://www.bretagne.fr/internet/jcms/c_13544/cooperation-internationale-et-reseaux, and between East Sussex and Veszprém Megye Önkormányzata dated 1996, and Kreis Pinneberg, retrieved through personal communication.
- (4) This was before the 1998 local government re-organization in England, so the unitary authorities of Brighton and Hove, Medway, Portsmouth and Southampton did not exist in their current form at this time.
- (5) Interview with former English local official, Portsmouth, July 2012.
- (6) Bilateral agreement between Conseil régional de Basse-Normandie and Consiglio regionale della Toscana dated 2005, retrieved through personal communication.
- (7) Interview with French regional official, Rennes, August 2012.
- (8) The REALM project (Regional Adult Learning Multipliers and the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives) aims to better connect adult learning in European regions with EU policy development. Further information is available at <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/realms.htm>.

- (9) Interview with multilateral network staff, Brussels, July 2012.
- (10) Interview with French regional official, Rouen, September 2012.
- (11) Interview with English local official, Newport, May 2012.
- (12) SNAs also engaged in bilateral networking beyond Europe. Kent, for example, has built a link with Virginia in the United States (Casson and Dardanelli, 2012) and Southampton with Qingdao in China (Southampton City Council, 2007). Interviews with French regional officials also highlighted links with regions in Brazil, Morocco, Mali, Madagascar, Senegal and Algeria.
- (13) Bilateral agreements between Kent and Conseil général du Pas-de-Calais dated 2005, retrieved through personal communication, and between Bretagne and the Welsh Assembly Government dated 2004, retrieved from http://www.bretagne.fr/internet/jcms/c_13544/cooperation-internationale-et-reseaux.
- (14) Bilateral agreement between Bretagne and Freistaat Sachsen dated 2005, retrieved from http://www.bretagne.fr/internet/jcms/c_13544/cooperation-internationale-et-reseaux.
- (15) Interview with English local official, Maidstone, May 2012.
- (16) Interviews with English local officials, Winchester, July 2012 and Southampton, September 2012.

- (17) Bilateral agreements between Kent and Bács-Kiskun County General Assembly dated 2004 retrieved through personal communication, and between Bretagne and Województwo Wielkopolskie dated 2005, retrieved from http://www.bretagne.fr/internet/jcms/c_13544/cooperation-internationale-et-reseaux.
- (18) Interview with English local official, Brussels, July 2012.
- (19) Interviews with English local and French regional officials, Maidstone, May 2012 and Lille, September 2012.
- (20) Personal communication with French regional official, July 2013.
- (21) Personal communication with English local official, July 2013.
- (22) Interview with English local official, Chatham, July 2012.
- (23) Interview with English local councillor, Chichester, April 2012.
- (24) Interview with multilateral network staff, Brussels, July 2012.
- (25) Interview with French regional official, Rennes, August 2012.
- (26) Interviews with multilateral network staff and English local officials, Brussels, July 2012, Southampton, September 2012 and Brighton, May 2012.
- (27) Interview with English councillor, Winchester, July 2012.
- (28) Interview with English councillor, Winchester, July 2012 and letter from leader of West Sussex County Council to chairman of the Arc Manche dated 2011, retrieved through personal communication, July 2013.

- (29) Interview with former English local official, Ventnor, May 2012.
- (30) Arc Manche multilateral agreement dated 2003, retrieved through personal communication.
- (31) Interviews with English local and French regional officials, Brussels, July 2012, Chichester, May 2012, Southampton, September 2012 and Rouen, September 2012.
- (32) Interview with former English local official, Portsmouth, July 2012.
- (33) Interview with English local official, Lewes, May 2012.
- (34) Interview with Interreg joint technical secretariat staff, Rouen, September 2012.
- (35) Interview with Interreg joint technical secretariat staff, Lille, September 2012.
- (36) Interview with former English local official, London, July 2012.
- (37) Interview with English councillor, Portsmouth, December 2012.
- (38) Interviews with French regional officials, Rennes, August 2012, and Lille September 2012.
- (39) Interviews with French regional officials, Amiens, September 2012.
- (40) Interviews with French regional officials, Brussels, July 2012 and Rennes, August 2012.
- (41) Interviews with English local officials, Ventnor, May 2012 and Newport, August 2012.
- (42) Interview with English local official, Chatham, July 2012.
- (43) Interview with English local official, Brighton, May 2012.

(44) Interview with Interreg staff, Chichester, May 2012.

(45) Interviews with multilateral network staff, Brussels, July 2012.

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